Rules of the Game
Enchantments (Part One)
By Skip Williams

The ability to magically force others to do your bidding is one of the more exciting -- and terrifying -- aspects of magic. In the **D&D** game, spells of the enchantment school provide the primary means of controlling others. Enchantment spells can prove extremely powerful in play because of their potential to immediately remove a foe from a combat or even turn it against its allies. This short series takes a quick look at enchantments and offers some tips for handling the more troublesome spells in the school.

The Language of Enchantments

Here are a few terms you'll encounter in this article.

Charm Spell: One of two subschools of the enchantment school. A charm spell changes the subject's perception so that the subject thinks of the spell's caster (or possibly some other creature the caster designates) as a valued friend or ally. A charm spell differs from a compulsion spell in that it does not force the subject to do anything. Instead, the spell prompts a change in thinking in the subject that in turn affects how the subject behaves.

Compulsion Spell: One of the two subschools of the enchantment school. A compulsion spell forces the subject to act as the spell's caster dictates. Some compulsion spells short circuit the subject's mind and prevent the subject from acting. Other compulsions force a limited set of instructions in the subject's mind and the subject then follows those instructions to the best of its ability. Still other compulsions allow the user to seize control over the subject's mind and consequently dictate the subject's actions.

Enchantment: One of the eight schools of magic in the **D&D** game. As Rules of the Game pointed out in Reading Spell Descriptions, "enchantment" has a fairly restricted meaning in the **D&D** game. Fantasy literature often uses the term "enchantment" as a catchall for any magical effect. In the **D&D** game, however, enchantment spells affect the mind and cause the recipient to think and act in ways that the subject would not do otherwise.

Related Series

DM advice for charmed characters can be found in the recent Save My Game articles: Adjudicating Charms, Part 1 and Part 2. In addition, Tactics & Tips looked at dealing with charmed characters turned against their own party, in When Good Friends Go Bad. Consult these articles for further reference.

Enchantment

Enchantment spells affect the minds of others, influencing or controlling their behavior. Representative spells include *charm person* and *suggestion.* All enchantments are mind-affecting spells. Two types of enchantment spells grant you influence over a subject creature.

Charm: A charm spell changes how the subject views you, typically making it see you as a good friend.

Compulsion: A compulsion spell forces the subject to act in some manner or changes the way her mind works. Some compulsion spells determine the subject's actions or the effects on the subject, some compulsion spells allow you to determine the subject's actions when you cast the spell, and others give you ongoing control over the subject.

Spells from this school always have the mind-affecting descriptor. Consequently, enchantment spells affect only creatures (and not all creatures).

Language-Dependent: A spell descriptor (see Reading Spell Descriptions) indicating a spell that depends on some kind of intelligible speech between the spell caster and the subject. That is, the caster must speak to the recipient in a language that the recipient understands. One could use a magical means, such as the *tongues* spell, to provide the necessary means of communication.

You can use some means of nonverbal "speech" (such as a *helm of telepathy*) when verbal communications aren't possible or desirable.

Many enchantment spells have the language-dependent descriptor, but not all of them do. Even when an enchantment spell does not have the language-dependent descriptor, a subject cannot obey a spellcaster's orders unless the caster finds some way to communicate with the subject (see the discussion of the *charm person* spell in Part Two for an example).

From the Sense Motive skill description on page 81 of the *Player's Handbook*:

SENSE MOTIVE (WIS)

Use this skill to tell when someone is bluffing you, to discern hidden messages in conversations, or to sense when someone is being magically influenced. This skill represents sensitivity to the body language, speech habits, and mannerisms of others.

Check: A successful check lets you avoid being bluffed (see the Bluff skill, page 67). You can also use this skill to determine when "something is up" (that is, something odd is going on) or to assess someone's trustworthiness. Your DM may decide to make your Sense Motive check secretly, so that you don't necessarily know whether you were successful.

Task Sense Motive DC

Hunch 20
Sense enchantment 25 or 15
Discern secret message Varies

Sense Enchantment: You can tell that someone's behavior is being influenced by an enchantment effect (by definition, a mind-affecting effect), such as *charm person,* even if that person isn't aware of it. The usual DC is 25, but if the target is dominated (see *dominate person* in Chapter 11: Spells), the DC is only 15 because of the limited range of the target's activities.

Action: Trying to gain information with Sense Motive generally takes at least 1 minute, and you could spend a whole evening trying to get a sense of the people around you.

Try Again: No, though you may make a Sense Motive check for each Bluff check made against you.

Special: A ranger gains a bonus on Sense Motive checks when using this skill against a favored enemy

(see page 47).

If you have the Negotiator feat, you get a +2 bonus on Sense Motive checks.

Synergy: If you have 5 or more ranks in Sense Motive, you get a +2 bonus on Diplomacy checks.

Mind-Affecting: A spell descriptor (see *Rules of the Game: Reading Spell Descriptions*) indicating a spell that alters the subject's thoughts, emotions, and perceptions. In the latter case, the subject's senses aren't affected, but the subject's mental responses to her senses are changed.

Mind-affecting effects include charms, compulsions, phantasms, patterns, fear effects, and morale effects.

Mind-affecting spells don't work on creatures that lack Intelligence scores (such creatures literally do not have minds), nor do they affect constructs, oozes, plants, undead, and vermin.

If a mind-affecting special attack from a creature also has the sonic descriptor, you can become immune to the attack by stopping your ears, but only if you do so before you're subjected to the attack (see page 314 in the *Monster Manual*). As noted in the glossary entry (see the sonic attack entry for more information), stopping one's ears ahead of time allows opponents to avoid having to make saving throws against mind-affecting sonic attacks, but not other kinds of sonic attacks (such as those that deal damage).

Enchantment Basics

As noted earlier, all enchantment spells are mind-affecting spells. Enchantments don't work on mindless creatures, nor do they work on certain other kinds of creatures, such as undead (see the previous section). A few other basics follow:

Detecting Enchantments

When you suspect that an ally has been enchanted, you can confirm your suspicion using the *detect magic* spell or the Sense Motive skill on page 81 of the *Player's Handbook.*

> **From the *dispel magic* spell text on page 223 of the *Player's Handbook*:**
>
> *Targeted Dispel:* One object, creature, or spell is the target of the *dispel magic* spell. You make a dispel check (1d20 + your caster level, maximum +10) against the spell or against each ongoing spell currently in effect on the object or creature. The DC for this dispel check is 11 + the spell's caster level.

Anyone who has received an enchantment spell has an aura of enchantment magic that a *detect magic* spell can detect. The aura's power depends on the spell level, as shown in the *detect magic* spell description. If the subject has received multiple spells, stronger auras might mask weaker ones, making it more difficult or impossible to identify the enchantment aura, also as noted in the spell description.

An enchanted creature does not act entirely under its own volition, and its speech, movements, posture, and expressions can betray the enchantment to a careful observer. If you study or interact with a subject for 1 minute, you can make a Sense Motive check to determine if the subject is enchanted. The task isn't easy, and the usual Sense Motive DC for noting an enchantment is 25. A domination effect (such as *dominate person* or *dominate*

monster) brings the subject under such firm control that the DC to note the enchantment is only 15. The rules don't say so, but DMs should feel free to allow a Sense Motive bonus of +2 to +4 when the character using the skill knows the subject well.

Negating Enchantments

Characters who receive enchantment spells tend to attract additional spells as the subject's allies try to intervene and get the character acting normally again.

> **From the *binding* spell text on page 205 of the *Player's Handbook*:**
>
> You can't dispel a *binding* spell with *dispel magic* or a similar effect, though an *antimagic field* or *Mordenkainen's disjunction* affects it normally. A bound extraplanar creature cannot be sent back to its home plane due to *dismissal, banishment,* or a similar effect.

The tried and true *dispel magic* spell can end most enchantments; a few, such as *binding,* aren't subject to dispelling, so always check the spell description to learn if a spell cannot be dispelled. You can cast *dispel magic* several different ways. When trying to remove an unwanted enchantment from an ally, a targeted dispel usually is the best bet. See the spell description and *Rules of the Game: More Magical Oddities* for details.

You can use *dispel chaos, dispel evil, dispel good,* or *dispel law* to remove one enchantment spell from a creature you touch. The spell you remove must have been cast by a character with the appropriate alignment. For example, a *dispel chaos* spell removes enchantments that a chaotic character has cast. No roll is required to dispel the enchantment; you need only touch the creature that has received the enchantment.

> **From the *dispel evil* spell text on page 222 of the *Player's Handbook*:**
>
> Third, with a touch you can automatically dispel any one enchantment spell cast by an evil creature or any one evil spell. *Exception:* Spells that can't be dispelled by *dispel magic* also can't be dispelled by *dispel evil.* Saving throws and spell resistance do not apply to this effect. This use discharges and ends the spell.

Removing an enchantment discharges and ends the *dispel chaos, dispel evil, dispel good,* or *dispel law* spell, as noted in the spell description. The rules don't say what happens when the creature you touch has received more than one enchantment. The DM can allow the *dispel chaos, dispel evil, dispel good,* or *dispel law* user to specify the spell to be removed (see *Rules of the Game: More Magical Oddities* for some suggestions about how a character might do that). Or, you can assume the spell removes the highest level enchantment (that is subject to dispelling) that the subject has received.

Many enchantment spells allow the subject a chance to throw off the spell when ordered to do something contrary to its interests or nature. Exactly what sort of orders prompt a new saving throw vary with the spell and are noted in the spell description. Not all enchantments allow new saving throws.

When a subject gains a new saving throw, the effects of a successful save usually negate the spell (at least for that recipient). Check the saving throw entry in the spell description for the effects of any successful saving throw against the spell.

> **From the Aiming a Spell section on page 175 of the *Player's Handbook*:**
>
> **Target or Targets:** Some spells, such as *charm person,* have a target or targets. You cast these spells on creatures or objects, as defined by the spell itself. You must be able to see or touch the target, and you must specifically choose that target. For example, you can't fire a *magic missile* spell (which always hits its target) into a group of bandits with the instruction to strike "the leader." To strike the leader, you must be able to identify and see the leader (or guess which is the leader and get lucky). However, you do not have to select your target until you finish casting the spell.
>
> If the target of a spell is yourself (the spell description has a line that reads Target: You), you do not receive a saving throw, and spell resistance does not apply. The Saving Throw and Spell Resistance lines are omitted from such spells.
>
> Some spells restrict you to willing targets only. Declaring yourself as a willing target is something that can be done at any time (even if you're flat-footed or it isn't your turn). Unconscious creatures are automatically considered willing, but a character who is conscious but immobile or helpless (such as one who is bound, cowering, grappling, paralyzed, pinned, or stunned) is not automatically willing. Some spells, such as *flaming sphere* and *spiritual weapon,* allow you to redirect the effect to new targets or areas after you cast the spell. Redirecting a spell is a move action that does not provoke attacks of opportunity.

Aiming Enchantments

Most (but not all) enchantment spells have target entries. That means the caster must see or touch the recipient to aim the spell. See *Rules of the Game: Reading Spell Descriptions* for details. If the spell affects multiple targets, the caster must be able to see or touch all of them to affect them with the spell.

When an enchantment doesn't have a target entry, you usually don't have to see or touch the recipient. Instead, you can aim the spell at some location you can see or specify; see Aiming a Spell on page 175 of the *Player's Handbook* and *Rules of the Game: Reading Spell Descriptions* for details.

An Enchantment Spell's Results

When an enchantment spell (or any spell) has a target entry, you usually know when the spell works and when it does not. When an enchantment's target fails a saving throw against a spell, you may know promptly that the spell worked because the target's behavior may change abruptly. However, trying to feign being enchanted by a targeted spell after a successful save does not work because the caster will note the successful saving throw.

> **From the Saving Throw section on page 177 of the *Player's Handbook*:**
>
> Likewise, if a creature's saving throw succeeds against a targeted spell, such as *charm person*, you sense that the spell has failed. You do not sense when creatures succeed on saves against effect and area spells.

When an enchantment spell (or any spell) has an area or effect entry, the caster does not note successful saves against the spell.

Stacking Enchantment Spells

When a creature receives more than one enchantment spell, refer to the rules on pages 171-172 in the *Player's Handbook*. As a rule of thumb, all enchantment spells a creature receives continue to function when the creature receives additional enchantment spells. The spells' effects might stack, overlap, or override each other, as noted below:

From the Saving Throw section on pages 171 and 172 of the *Player's Handbook*:

COMBINING MAGICAL EFFECTS

Spells or magical effects usually work as described, no matter how many other spells or magical effects happen to be operating in the same area or on the same recipient. Except in special cases, a spell does not affect the way another spell operates. Whenever a spell has a specific effect on other spells, the spell description explains that effect. Several other general rules apply when spells or magical effects operate in the same place:

Stacking Effects: Spells that provide bonuses or penalties on attack rolls, damage rolls, saving throws, and other attributes usually do not stack with themselves. For example, two *bless* spells don't give twice the benefit of one *bless*. Both *bless* spells, however, continue to act simultaneously, and if one ends first, the other one continues to operate for the remainder of its duration. Likewise, two *haste* spells do not make a creature doubly fast. More generally, two bonuses of the same type don't stack even if they come from different spells (or from effects other than spells; see Bonus Types, above). For example, the enhancement bonus to Strength from a *bull's strength* spell and the enhancement bonus to Strength from a *divine power* spell don't stack. You use whichever bonus gives you the better Strength score. In the same way, a *belt of giant Strength* gives you an enhancement bonus to Strength, which does not stack with the bonus you get from a *bull's strength* spell.

Different Bonus Names: The bonuses or penalties from two different spells stack if the modifiers are of different types. For example, *bless* provides a +1 morale bonus on saves against fear effects, and *protection from evil* provides a +2 resistance bonus on saves against spells cast by evil creatures. A character under the influence of spells gets a +1 bonus against fear effects, a +2 bonus against spells cast by evil beings, and a +3 bonus against *fear* spells cast by evil creatures.

A bonus that isn't named (just a "+2 bonus" rather than a "+2 resistance bonus") stacks with any bonus.

Same Effect More than Once in Different Strengths: In cases when two or more identical spells are operating in the same area or on the same target, but at different strengths, only the best one applies. For example, if a character takes a -4 penalty to Strength from a *ray of enfeeblement* spell and then receives a second *ray of enfeeblement* spell that applies a -6 penalty, he or she takes only the -6 penalty. Both spells are still operating on the character, however. If one *ray of enfeeblement* spell is dispelled or its duration runs out, the other spell remains in effect, assuming that its duration has not yet expired.

Same Effect with Differing Results: The same spell can sometimes produce varying effects if applied to the same recipient more than once. For example, a series of *polymorph* spells might turn a creature into a mouse, a lion, and then a snail. In this case, the last spell in the series trumps the others. None of the previous spells are actually removed or dispelled, but their effects become irrelevant while the final spell in the series lasts.

One Effect Makes Another Irrelevant: Sometimes, one spell can render a later spell irrelevant. For example, if a wizard is using a *shapechange* spell to take the shape of an eagle, a *polymorph* spell could change her into a goldfish. The *shapechange* spell is not negated, however, and since the *polymorph* spell has no effect on the recipient's special abilities, the wizard could use the *shapechange* effect to take any form the spell allows whenever she desires. If a creature using a *shapechange* effect becomes petrified by a *flesh to stone* spell, however, it turns into a mindless, inert statue, and the *shapechange* effect cannot help it escape.

Multiple Mental Control Effects: Sometimes magical effects that establish mental control render each other irrelevant. For example, a *hold person* effect renders any other form of mental control irrelevant because it robs the subject of the ability to move. Mental controls that don't remove the recipient's ability to act usually do not interfere with each other. For example, a person who has received a *geas/quest* spell can also be subjected to a *charm person* spell. The *charmed* person remains committed to fulfilling the quest, however, and resists any order that interferes with that goal. In this case, the *geas/quest* spell doesn't negate *charm person,* but it does reduce its effectiveness, just as nonmagical devotion to a quest would. If a creature is under the mental control of two or more creatures, it tends to obey each to the best of its ability, and to the extent of the control each effect allows. If the controlled creature receives conflicting orders simultaneously, the competing controllers must make opposed Charisma checks to determine which one the creature obeys.

Spells with Opposite Effects: Spells with opposite effects apply normally, with all bonuses, penalties, or changes accruing in the order that they apply. Some spells negate or counter each other. This is a special effect that is noted in a spell's description.

Instantaneous Effects: Two or more spells with instantaneous durations work cumulatively when they affect the same target. For example, when two *fireballs* strike a same creature, the target must attempt a saving throw against each *fireball* and takes damage from each according to the saving throws' results. If a creature receives two *cure light wounds* spells in a single round, both work normally.

Enchantments That Provide Bonuses: When any spell produces a bonus with a name, that bonus usually doesn't stack with bonuses that have the same name (see page 21 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* and *Rules of the Game: [Does it Stack](#)?*), so the two effects overlap. For example, the +1 morale bonus on attack rolls and saves against fear effects from an *aid* spell won't stack with the +1 morale bonus on attack rolls and saves against fear effects from a *bless* spell. The *aid* and *bless* spells don't negate each other, however. If the *aid* spell lasts longer that the *bless* spell (or vice versa), the target still gets the benefits of the remaining spell.

When two or more spells provide bonuses with different names, their effects stack. For example, the +1 morale bonus on attack rolls and saves against fear effects from an *aid* spell stacks with the +1 luck bonus on attack rolls and all saves from a *prayer* spell. *Prayer's* luck bonus applies to more than just attack rolls and saves (see the spell description), but only the portion of the spell that stacks with *aid* concerns us here.

Enchantments That Render Other Enchantments Irrelevant: In many cases, one enchantment spell renders another spell irrelevant. For example, a *hold person* spell effectively paralyzes the target, rendering just about every other enchantment spell the target might receive (either before or after the *hold person* spell) irrelevant while the *hold person* lasts. For example, you might use a spell such as *charm person, suggestion, confusion,* or

dominate person spell to control or influence a creature's actions. A creature that also receives a *hold person* spell freezes in place, making that creature unable to act as the *charm person, suggestion, confusion,* or *dominate person* spell dictates (or allows the caster to dictate) while the *hold person* lasts.

When one enchantment spell makes another enchantment spell (or any other spell) irrelevant, the irrelevant spell does not end. When the overriding spell ends, any spells it has rendered irrelevant reassert themselves if their durations haven't expired.

Multiple Enchantments That Provide Control: Two enchantments that don't remove the recipient's ability to act usually do not interfere with each other. If a creature has received enchantments that make it obey orders from two or more creatures, it tends to obey each to the best of its ability, and to the extent of the control each enchantment allows. If the controlled creature receives conflicting orders simultaneously, the competing controllers must make opposed Charisma checks to determine which one the creature obeys. Making the opposed check isn't an action for either caster.

For example, a creature receives a *dominate person* spell from one caster and a *charm person* spell from another. Both spells work, and the creature must obey both casters. If the creature simultaneously receives orders and cannot obey both casters (for example, when the casters each orders the subject to approach a different location), the casters make opposed Charisma checks and the subject obeys the caster who wins the check. See Part Two for additional notes on *charm person* and *dominate person.*

This rule applies only when a creature receives simultaneous orders, or orders that override each other. If only one caster gives orders, the subject obeys that caster.

What's Next?

That pretty well covers the basics of enchantment spells. Next week, we'll look at a few specific enchantment spells and see how the basics affect play.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon* Magazine for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual.* When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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